

Henry Jones
Wrote the old hymns

PRAYER.

A CONFIRMATION LECTURE,

BEING ONE OF A COURSE
DELIVERED TO CANDIDATES FOR CONFIRMATION

IN LEWIS, 1864.

BY THE

REV. HENRY ROE, B.A.,

INCUMBENT OF ST. MATTHEW'S CHAPEL, QUEBEC.

Published by Request.

QUEBEC:
PRINTED BY G. T. CARY, FABRIQUE STREET.

1864.

Price Six-pence.

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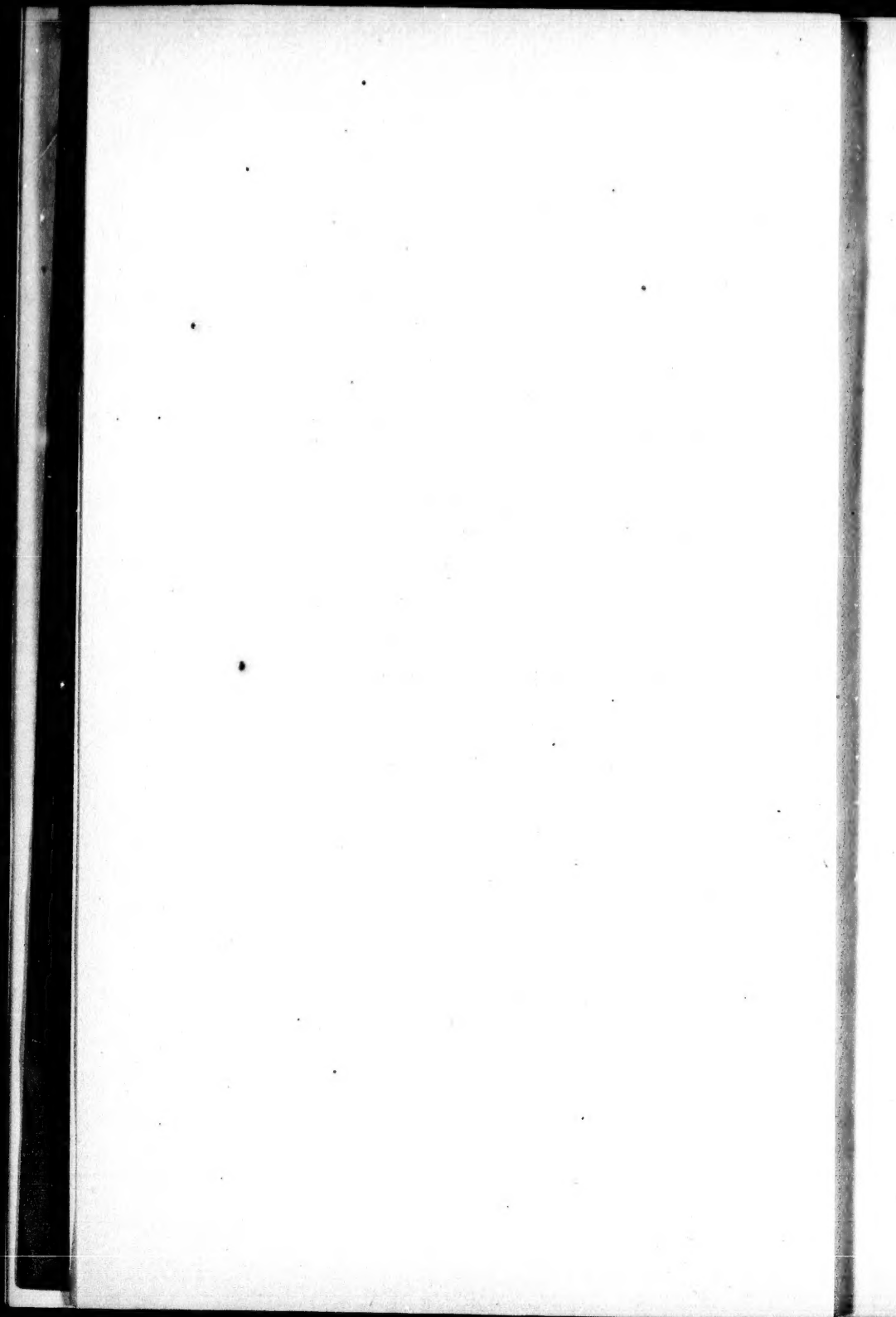
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Price Six-pence.

*The proceeds of the sale will be given to the Endowment Fund of
St. Matthew's Chapel.*

TO
THE MEMBERS OF MY CONFIRMATION CLASS OF 1864,
THIS LECTURE,
PRINTED FOR THEIR USE BY A KIND FRIEND
OF THE CONGREGATION,
IN THE HOPE THAT IT MAY,
BY GOD'S BLESSING,
HELP TO STIR UP THEIR PURE MINDS BY WAY OF
REMEMBRANCE OF A GREAT EVENT IN THEIR LIVES,
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,
BY THEIR PASTOR.
QUEBEC, EASTER-TIDE, 1864.

owment Fund of



P R A Y E R .

GAL. IV. 6.

" And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father ! "

My subject to-day is Prayer, a subject how large, how all important, how awful I need not say. You, young Christians, have often heard me speak, from this place, of prayer in its many aspects, and urge upon the congregation the necessity of giving heed before everything else to become men of prayer. You have, too, been taught to pray from your infancy up, at your mother's knee, at your own bedside, at the family altar, and here in the House of God. You have thus had the means of learning your duty, and helps to it of no ordinary kind. And in the course of preparatory instruction, which I have gone through with you during the last five months, I have taken many opportunities of impressing upon you the grand importance of secret prayer. And what can I now more say? Much, very much, for the subject of prayer is exhaustless. I propose, therefore, to speak to you very earnestly upon several parts of the great duty of Prayer.

And may God, for Christ's sake, by His Holy Spirit, impress these things upon your hearts, may He both teach and help you to pray !

Prayer is set before you in the Catechism, as a means by which you may be enabled to keep your baptismal

promise, and without which you cannot keep it. Without prayer, I say, you cannot keep your baptismal vow. But it is of far more consequence for you to know that with prayer you can keep it. Prayer is the instrument that will infallibly draw down God's grace, His help—His grace to help you in every time of need. You never can be assailed by any temptation which prayer will not help you to overcome. You never can be placed in any difficulty that prayer will not show you the way out of it. You never can sink so low down into trouble, or sorrow that prayer will not make for you a way of escape. On the other hand, no amount of earnestness, of resolution, of courage, of love for what is good and right, will be strong enough to carry you through, in your efforts to obey and to do God's will, without prayer. You cannot do anything that is good without God's help, and that help you cannot have without prayer. But by prayer you can have it; in answer to prayer it will come down. Prayer will open your eye of faith to see, as Jacob did, Heaven and earth re-united, and the angels of God ascending and descending to convey to you the help you need. Prayer will keep that union of Heaven and Earth open before you, and as long as it is so kept open you are safe.

How glorious is the position of a young Christian setting out in right earnest to fight the good fight of faith! You go from your confirmation—which is a renewing of your oath of allegiance to Christ, a re-enlisting under His banner—with His blessing fresh upon you, strengthened with the Holy Ghost the Comforter, with no burden of unforgiven sin upon your conscience, but cheered with the happy consciousness that the great and Holy God is your Heavenly Father. You go out, knowing indeed

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that your spiritual foes are many and fearfully dangerous, but looking not so much at them as at the good work which you have to do, and the Saviour, whose hand you are to hold and cling to, as you are daily endeavouring to follow the blessed steps of His most Holy Life. You go out knowing that you carry with you a secret instrument by which you can at any moment summon a mighty One to your aid. How, then, can you fail?

In those dear old stories which we listened to in our childhood with such delight, we heard of some mighty Genie or powerful Fairy summoned in a moment by the pressing of a ring or the rubbing of a lamp or some other simple appointment, and we longed intensely for some such means of summoning some mighty one to do our will. In a beautiful religious allegory of our own day, called *The Distant Hills*, this idea is adopted, and the children journeying to the Distant Hills are supplied each with a flute, by playing upon which they can call a Shining One to their aid at every time of need. The flute played upon is the soul lifted up to God in prayer; and thus the dreams of our childhood become glorious and awful realities. For at one simple prayer, one earnest faithful cry of the soul, God Himself flies to the rescue, and throws around His child the shelter of His everlasting arms. O then how great a thing for you, young Christians, to know and to learn how to pray aright! Who is to teach you this? The Spirit of God's Son whom He hath sent forth into your hearts,—He alone can teach you vitally, practically, savingly. If you seek His teaching, if you listen to His voice, He will be in you as a spirit of prayer, evermore crying Abba, Father, kindling within you those holy desires after God which prayer alone will satisfy, making prayer, to you, not only

not burdensome, but necessary as your daily bread, and in time, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb—more precious than thousands of gold and silver.

Now being anxious to keep as close to the Catechism in these lectures as possible, I propose to speak upon the several points which are suggested by the question in the Catechism which introduces the Lord's Prayer, "*My good child, &c.*"

Here, then, you are told that you must learn to call upon God by diligent prayer—to pray at all times—to pray for God's special grace—and not only to use the Lord's Prayer, but also to pray always in the spirit and temper of that holy model of all right prayer. On these points I shall briefly speak to you.

1. First, then, when you are told that you must *learn to call upon God*, and that *by diligent prayer*, these words intimate to you that prayer is not a slight or easy work, which any one can do, and in which you need no instruction. No, it is far otherwise. In religion (as in everything else) there is nothing valuable that can be got without pains or trouble. Prayer is so important a part of religion that it may almost be said to be the whole of it; and yet there are many persons who think that any one can pray at anytime without preparation or instruction! You must take pains with your prayers, you must learn to pray better and better, to improve and grow in this grace as in every other. Diligent prayer surely implies earnestness—that a person gives his heart to the work, that he takes pains to do it as well as he can, that *his heart is in it*. We often see a person at a work, and we say, 'He will never do any good at that, his heart is not in

it'. We mean that the man is not in earnest about his work, that he only does it because he cannot help himself, he does not like his work and does not try to like it. Now this is true of too many prayers. There is no heart or life about them, no earnestness, no reality, no real wish to make them hearty and earnest. All such prayers die before they are born, they never reach the ceiling, much less the ears of God in heaven.

You must, then, study and give diligence to make your prayers what they ought to be. One means of making them what they ought to be is taking pains to provide ourselves with proper prayers, proper forms of prayer, which we can always have ready for use. (I am of course now speaking of our regular daily prayers.) If any one say, 'But will not God hear our own words, if we set our wants before him in the best way we can?' I answer,—Most assuredly He will, if you do so. But take care that you do set your wants before Him *in the best way that you can*. That is not, surely, to drop carelessly upon your knees without thinking at all of what you are going to say, and trusting to any chance thoughts that may come into your mind at the time. You should prepare yourself for prayer and have your petitions ready, before you venture into the presence of the Most High. Take pains to improve your prayers, to pray better and better. God loves to be so honoured by those who approach Him. The serious, the earnest, the pains-taking christian, the diligent man in prayer, is the one who will always go back from prayer, having the petitions that he asked of God.

2. Then, secondly, when the catechism says we are to "learn *at all times* to call upon God," this implies

that we have *regular stated times of prayer*. The wisdom and piety of all generations have regulated this point, and required, as the very least and lowest standard, that every christian should pray to God in private evening and morning. This, then, never omit, as you value your soul's health and happiness, and God's favour and blessing. Watch, too, against its degenerating into a mere form—guard its awful sacredness with the greatest jealousy. Remember that the God you serve is a jealous God, and is offended when your suffer His Holy Image to be lightly shut out from your eye by any other object at those appointed hours when nothing else should be seen by you.

And you will find every day things coming in (as if it were by chance, each time, but it is the snare of the Enemy) to mar and spoil your prayers, and make them empty, earthly and unmeaning.

In the morning, it will be an overpowering desire for a little more sleep; and when you are up, some paper or book or passing incident will attract your attention, turning your heart away from God, as well as causing the time you have to give to prayer to dwindle down almost to nothing. Then your prayers will be hurried through, without heart, without comfort, with reproach of conscience; and you will go forth to your work with heaviness and vexation, and a gnawing feeling that all is not right, which will add an almost unbearable burden to the day's toll.

At night, it will be, at one time weariness and sleepiness, at another time excitement of mind, remembrance of cares, pleasures, vexations or affronts—coming crowding

in again and again into the soul, and shutting out the Holy Spirit of God.

O my children, these day-by-day oppositions of the flesh and the Devil to your prayers, these ceaseless endeavours of the Enemy to drag you down and make you earthly and worldly-minded, to distract and divert your attention—these are the things of which your Lord especially warns you when He says, “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation;” and against which St. Peter, the loving christian pastor, warns you, saying, “Be sober and watch unto prayer;” and St. Paul, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereto with all perseverance.” If you here give way, and fall gradually into a habit of carelessness and formality, all your religion will evaporate, until there will be nothing left except the stony ground of your natural hard and selfish heart. Have, therefore, your regular hour of morning and evening prayer, and guard its sacredness as you would guard your life from destruction,—“for it is no vain thing, for it is your life.”*

3. The question in the Catechism speaks of praying for God’s *special grace*. This is a quality of prayer which is too little considered, and yet it is hard to understand how any serious Christian can help making his prayers, in a large measure, prayers for special grace.

By ‘God’s special grace’, I understand the help or grace that is suited to aid us in each particular act of obedience that we have to do, and to succour us in each particular temptation that we are called upon to meet

* Deuteronomy xxxii. 47.

and overcome. Thus, when Peter (ready to sink as he tried to walk on the water) stretched out his arms to Jesus, saying "Lord, save me,"—or when the two blind men said to Him "Lord, that our eyes may be opened,"—or the woman of Canaan, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, my daughter is grievously vexed of a devil,"—or Martha and Mary, "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick,"—all these were prayers for special grace. Each one asked for the exact blessing he needed.

So must we, trying to find out our dangers and temptations, pray for grace suited to our particular characters, temptations and sins, and to the doing of those particular works which it is our duty to do. The Christian youth who is really trying to grow in grace,—who 'sets the Lord always before him', endeavouring to walk with God,—will pray thus instinctively. Many a time with bitter grief and tears will the soul be poured out in confession before the Saviour, and many a time, as a new work is undertaken, or a new project is under consideration, will God's counsel and direction be earnestly asked. This is the way to walk with God, and to 'live by faith, not by sight'.

And this leads me to speak of another kind of prayer, which may even more properly be called prayer for special grace—I mean ejaculatory prayer. An ejaculatory prayer is a brief petition suddenly and earnestly sent up to God, as one is walking, or sitting, or standing, or otherwise engaged, for some special help in some special danger or difficulty. An instance of it, and a beautiful one, occurs in the history of Nehemiah.

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Nehemiah, a young Jewish noble in captivity at Babylon, was the King's cup-bearer. Hearing of the desolations of Jerusalem he was full of sorrow of heart. The King, noticing his sadness, enquired its cause, and being told by the trembling youth, asks him—"What is thy request?" Now, Nehemiah had conceived in his heart a deep desire, which must have seemed even to himself extravagant and impossible, that he should be the chosen instrument to rebuild the Holy City. When, therefore, the King said, What is thy request?—"then" says Nehemiah, "I prayed to the God of Heaven." Gathering up his whole soul, the pious youth darted up one short petition to his God, that He would be pleased to move the King's heart. And, lo, it was done! One short ejaculation, one strong shaft of prayer sent up to God, had won the restoration of the Holy City, the joy of the whole earth!

Cultivate, young Christians, this pious habit. When it is formed, then you will know the meaning of St. Paul's words, "Pray without ceasing." In all your temptations—and you will meet with them every day—in all the uprisings of angry passions in your hearts, in all the sudden darting of evil thoughts into your souls, like Nehemiah, pray to the God of Heaven. And when the temptation is past and overcome, send up after your prayer a brief thanksgiving. This is the secret of overcoming temptation, which vanishes before the thought of the awful majesty, purity and love of God, and is driven away by His gracious help.

4. The Lord's Prayer, when we come to look into it, shows us how much is included in the short word, prayer—

not only asking, but the holy praise of God, intercession for all estates of men, thanksgiving for benefits received, confession of sin and supplication for pardon, as well as asking for the supply of our wants. All these go to make up prayer.

Of course, I do not propose to expound the Lord's Prayer today, but, there is one feature in it to which I desire to direct your most careful attention—it teaches us *reverence in prayer*.

Now, young Christians, you must remember that public prayer is *prayer*, yes, and even more solemn and awful than private prayer. I fear that there is many a Christian to be found who allows himself in habits at Church in time of prayer, that he would shudder at in himself in private prayer. And yet the prayers of the Church which we come here to offer to God, are far the more important of the two in God's sight, as we are assured in His Holy Word. We come here to worship God,—to join in worshipping Him, to offer to Him the tribute of our united homage, and unitedly to ask of Him the blessings we all need. Even in private, indeed, we do not pray as individuals, but as members of the One Body of Christ, for we say "*Our Father—give us.*" But in public, we see, we feel, we *taste* the Communion of Saints, we help one another here, we vie with one another in earnestness, in zeal, in devotion, in reverence, in attention; we catch the glow of the holy fire of the love of God that burns in one another's eye and glows out from the whole person! Is it not so?

My Brethren, *Is it so?* Is it these helps to devotion that we find in the House of God? It is, thank God, in part. I hope it is growing to be more and more a

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help that we try to afford one another, and get from one another. But, what shall we say of those who presume to sit in the presence of their Maker, with knee unbent, with wandering eye, with closed lip? Are they offering to God an acceptable sacrifice? Are they thinking of God at all? Is it possible that any mortal man would dare to presume in God's own House to say prayers to Him, sitting at his ease before Him? I hope not. I hope that those who sit during the prayers do not add to their irreverence the worse irreverence of deluding themselves into thinking that they can thus pray. Of course I do not speak of those persons who from infirmity cannot kneel, or not without so much difficulty and distress as to hinder their devotional feelings. Indeed such persons when devout are seen to be so by their whole demeanour, though they do not kneel. My Brethren, I fear to say all that I feel as to the great irreverence of the habit of sitting at prayer in Church. I know the power of inveterate habit, and how hard it is to shake off that false shame, which cannot endure to show any solemnity or earnestness even in God's House. But God's House is the very place where reverence should be shown, and where a reverent demeanour should be exhibited. Nothing can excuse a healthy person for sitting at his prayers in Church, when kneeling is possible. "O magnify the Lord our God, and *fall down* before His footstool for He is Holy." "O come let us worship and *fall down* and *kneel*, before the Lord our Maker."

But for you, young Christians, to whom I am speaking to day, remember that outward reverence is no small or unimportant matter. If you saw a boy outwardly disrespectful to his father could anyone persuade you that he was really

respectful? No more is it possible for a Christian to be outwardly irreverent, outwardly to assume an offensive and disrespectful demeanour towards God in His House, and inwardly to honor and fear Him and hallow His Great Name.

No observing person can help perceiving that the outward posture of the body has an effect upon the mind; and it is equally certain that your behaviour in Church is either a real help or a serious hinderance to your neighbour's devotions. Take your place in Church between two persons who are reverent and devout in their demeanour one Sunday, and between two careless persons another Sunday, and what a difference there will have been in your own prayers! The one Sunday, it was hard for you not to feel devout; the other Sunday, devotional feeling was impossible.

Even in your own room it is the same. I do not suppose that anyone thinks of sitting to say his prayers in his closet at home; but even there, if at one time you kneel in a lolling, lazy posture, and at another time you kneel up straight, with your hands reverently clasped and your eyes closed, the one posture will incline your mind to wander and your body to drowsiness, while the other posture will help you to keep in mind God's eye fixed upon you.

Be reverent, then, in your manners and behaviour; it is one step towards securing the reverence and attention of the heart and of the whole life. Remember that Christ our Lord teaches us to say, 'Hallowed be Thy Name, in Earth as it is in Heaven.' How is it hallowed in Heaven? Does not every glimpse that we have in Scripture of the worship of God by the holy angels, represent them to us as evincing, when they approach to their Eternal Lord, the lowliest reverence in act and gesture?

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And is not this our Lord's own example? What awful reverence, what humility, what lowly self-abasement were displayed by Him in outward gesture as well as in word in all His prayers to His Father! "He looked up to Heaven;" "He lifted up His eyes to Heaven;" "He kneeled down;" "He fell on His Face, and prayed." Follow, then, that example. "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." When you enter this House remember where you are. "The Lord is in His Holy Temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him!"*

Cultivate, then, young christians, a sense of the awfulness, the dread sacredness of prayer. Always recall to your remembrance, when you go down upon your knees, that you are going to speak to God. Think of the great happiness of being permitted to do so. Fill your mind with the Bible promises that God will answer faithful prayer. In the faith of those promises bring your requests before your God; make known to him your wants; ask him for particular blessings, and, in the way of your duty expect an answer, and look out for it until it comes. Ask very earnestly for spiritual blessings, and go out believing that you have them.† Carry forth with you into the world from your closet a remembrance of what you saw and felt there, that your prayers may sanctify your life—that you may be, in the hurry, the bustle, the excitements of life, the same dutiful, humble, loving child of God that you wished and prayed to be, when you were upon your knees. Often through the day send up, like a swift winged arrow, a secret prayer, to keep alive the union of your soul with God. Say, "Thou God seest me"! "Lord help me!"

* Hab. ii. 20. Zech. ii. 13.

† 1 John v. 15, 16.

"Praise the Lord, O my soul;" "Thy will be done"—for this is to watch and pray, and it is the whole secret of a holy life.

And how happy is such a life! Not safe only but happy, not only a preparation for Heaven, but Heaven begun. For "the Kingdom of God", says St Paul, "is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost"; and are not all these secured by prayer? What joy is equal to that of victory over sin and selfishness, and the sense of the approval of our Heavenly Father, when we go to thank Him for giving us the victory? There is about some christians a brightness and light-heartedness, which are evidently the perennial flow of a well-spring of peace deep within. This is the fulfilment of our Lord's promise, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink—and the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

It has been beautifully said by the Christian poet,

"There are in this loud stunning tide
 "Of human care and crime,
 "With whom the melodies abide
 "Of the everlasting chime,
 "Who carry music in their heart,
 "Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
 "Plying their daily task with busier feet,
 "Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.*

'Music in the heart,' 'the melodies of the everlasting chime'—these are the joys of the life of prayer, this is the peace which the world cannot give. Many, many such a bright day the christian enjoys, feeling on his head unceas-

* Keble's *Christian Year*, St. Matthew's Day.

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May this be your experience of the power of prayer, young Christians; may it be the gift of God to us all for Jesus Christ sake! Amen.